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The Iraq Political Crisis

On 22 November 1952, serious rioting in Baghdad forced the resignation of Prime Minister Mustapha al-Umari. It was characterized by anti-American and anti-British propaganda and the burning of several buildings, including the US Information Service Building. After Jamil al-Midfai, who had been Prime Minister five times, was unable to form a cabinet, the Regent on 22 November called upon 53-year old Lieutenant General Nur al-Din Muhsin, Iraqi Chief of Staff, to restore order and take over the government. The new Prime Minister has declared martial law in Baghdad, suspended the press and dissolved all political parties.

**Comment:** The appointment of the pro-British Iraqi Chief of Staff as Prime Minister indicates that while Iraq will probably remain pro-West, its political crisis is not over. The general's control of the army will enable him to maintain internal order. But he is apparently little interested in politics, has no platform, and hence he does not answer Iraq's need for political and social reforms. Moreover, his appointment as Chief of Staff in July 1951 aroused strong opposition because of his pro-Kurdish sympathies and his alleged "bungling" in the Palestinian war.

Nur al-Din's assumption of the premiership resulted from a deteriorating political situation brought on by mounting nationalist, reformist and radical discontent. This sentiment has crystallized in opposition to projected plans for the coming elections. Extremist parties and the more moderate party of Saleh Jabr, intent upon several basic reforms, have threatened to boycott any indirect elections.

Strong rule will not halt the growing unrest. The aroused public sentiment puts greater pressure on Iraq's governing classes to grant sorely needed reforms. Moreover, it creates an unfavorable atmosphere for renewal of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, for agreements with foreign oil companies, and for Iraq's acceptance of MEDO.

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